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PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM Elizabeth W. Bauer, Chair, Embracing the Information Age Task Force

SUBJECT Update on Embracing the Information Age Task Force Recommendations

The State Board of Education Task Force on Embracing the Information Age, Chaired by Board member, the Honorable Michael David Warren, Jr., presented its report to the Michigan State Board of Education on November 15, 2001. The report made four major policy recommendations with numerous suggestions for action by the Board, Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Intermediate School Districts, Regional Educational Service Agencies, local education agencies and boards of education, the Legislature and the Governor, and other policymakers. The four policy recommendations are:

Educator Preparation and Development – All educators and administrators will be prepared to use Information Age tools and learning techniques and processes.

Standards and Assessment – State and local academic standards, benchmarks, and assessments will reflect the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the Information Age.

Transcending the Four Walls – Schools will transcend their four walls and districts – distance learning and other learning resources will be integrated into the learning community.

Virtual Districts – Chronically underperforming schools and districts will form collaborative partnerships creating virtual districts by which all partners share best practices and resources.

In the 18 months since the report was presented to the Board, much progress has been made under each of these policy areas. Some of it as a direct result of Board action; some because of projects initiated within the state by government, universities, public and private sectors as a consequence of grants and other collaborative opportunities. At the end of 2002, Judge Warren concluded his service on the State Board of Education. Board President Kathleen Straus asked me, a newly elected Board member, to chair the Task Force and work to achieve the measurable outcomes of success contained in the report.

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I met with various leaders in the technology field during the months of January – July, 2003. They included staff of the Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Virtual University and Michigan Virtual High School, Merit Network, TEAM (Technology Education and Access for Michigan), and the Gates Project; vendors such as Intel, IBM, and Blackboard; and university technology personnel from Western Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, and Michigan State University. I visited schools in different parts of the state to see applications in wired and wireless environments. Presentations were made at various technology events both university and vendor-sponsored.

In February 2003, the Embracing the Information Age Task Force was reconvened at the collaboratorium at Michigan Virtual University (MIVU). The purpose of the meeting was for the new chair to meet and learn from the Task Force members as well as to prioritize the recommendations made in the report so that a plan of action could be developed and implemented.

Task Force members gave top priority to the policy recommendation: All educators and administrators will be prepared to use Information Age tools and learning techniques and processes. Training for administrators is occurring under the Gates Project – LEADing the Future. Superintendent Watkins, Deputy Superintendent Wolenberg, and I attended the June 18 introductory training for superintendents and principals. It is hoped all Board members will participate in this training not only to hone their skills but also to model the way for other education leaders currently serving in Michigan.

The Task Force also planned to convene the deans of the colleges of education in Michigan at the collaboratorium at MIVU. A draft letter of invitation was prepared. The purpose of the meeting would be to develop a framework for infusing technology in the pre-service education of teachers and administrators and a strategy for changing the curricula at various universities to accomplish this. The invitation has been delayed so that relevant recommendations of the other four Board Task Forces can be considered in the design for the meeting with the deans. It is hoped that the design sessions will occur in August and the meeting with the deans in October. Changes in curricula and methodology could be in place for the fall 2004 term.

The Task Force Report also calls for an update to the Michigan State Technology Plan (updated 2000) by MDE. There has also been discussion about integrating the School Improvement Plans with Technology Plans since technology is a critical factor in school improvement. In early July leaders of the Michigan Department of Information Technology (MDIT) met with MDE leaders to discuss a single state technology plan which would integrate the many initiatives now ongoing; for example, Speaker's (House of Representatives Rick Johnson) Freedom to Learn (formerly Michigan Wireless Learning) project and the No Child Left Behind education technology committee's efforts to put together an education technology plan. I discussed this prospect with staff from MDE on July 3, 2003, and with staff from the MDIT on July 17, 2003, and encouraged such cooperation. A statewide technology plan could address the policy recommendations of the Task Force on Embracing the Information Age and assure more deliberate action toward the desired outcomes.

The work of the Task Force continues. Members are in contact with one another and we welcome the active participation of Board members in advancing the technology agenda so that all Michigan's teachers and students are fully prepared to teach and learn in the Information Age.